



Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society

Annual Report of the Trustees for the year end December 2019

Trustees

Christine Jessop, Chairman
Lizzie Induni
Nathanael Williams
David Victor
David Baker
Christopher Chanter
Sue Goodman
Robert Hutchings
David Reid
Mark Lidster

Charity Number: 201929

Office

Somerset Heritage Centre, Brunel Way, Norton Fitzwarren, TA2 6SF

Accountant

Amherst & Shapland, Unit 2, Old Brewery Road, Wiveliscombe, TA4 2PW

Investment Manager

Brewin Dolphin, The Paragon, Counterslip, Bristol, BS1 6BX

Management of the Society

Since the last AGM, the Board of Trustees met in June, September, and November in 2019, and January of 2020. The board meeting for March was cancelled due to the Covid19 situation and business was dealt with by email. Virtual meetings of the Board have since been held on 1st June and 29th July.

A General Meeting was also held in December 2019 with a low attendance. As this is a discretionary meeting, it will only be held if there are matters that need raising before the AGM with the membership.

There were two extra meetings called in July 2019 to deal with problems that arose unexpectedly, one was a matter regarding nonpayment of rent from a tenant and the second was to decide

management of the Norman Gardens project following the resignation of the vice chair who was the lead for the project and had been responsible for raising the finances, supported by Janet Tall of the SWHT.

The Hon Treasurer had stood down at the 2019 AGM and despite circulating the vacancy it wasn't until late in the year that someone came forward. Kathy Brown has held a similar post where she was living but was moving to Somerset. She had hoped to join us in January of this year but renovations to the property she was moving to have not gone smoothly and she still hasn't arrived. David Victor has continued with a lot of his previous responsibility, the office manager took on some of the work. We are indebted to David for carrying out those tasks that are required legally.

Unfortunately Tom Winsborough who had joined us in February 2019 as Hon Secretary resigned for health reasons later in the year. We are still without a Vice Chairman or Hon Sec. as I write this. The posts have been advertised on the South West Federation website with no response. Neither of these posts are a full-time commitment and do not require presence in the office on a frequent basis. I had no previous experience with management of a society such as SANHS, but we have a very competent office manager who is there to support and point you in the right direction.

Our number of Trustees stands at 10, Nathanael Williams, Mark Lidster and Lizzie Induni have all joined the Board in the past year. They each come with their own interest and knowledge and have been very active in supporting the work of the Board and therefore the Society. We would welcome more members to come forward to join us. If you are considering becoming a Trustee, you would be welcome to attend one of the Board meetings as an observer.

We continue to keep the policies up to date, the risk register is monitored at each Board meeting and completed work is removed from the business plan but without additional help completed work will slow down.

Fiona Holmes 100 pot challenge had a spinoff whereby an event was held looking at the William De Morgan collection with talks by specialists in the field of ceramics. This was very successful, and people have asked for more of these events to celebrate our collections. These can only be held if people are prepared to come forward to help in the organisation. As the collections cannot be removed from the Heritage Centre. Amal Kreishie who is one of the curators of SWHT spent a whole day moving furniture and preparing the room, for which we are extremely grateful.

Rob Webley is now the Proceedings Editor, Mary Siraut having finished her final piece of indexing. The Society has made Mary an Honorary Member as a way of showing our appreciation for the years she has carried out the task on a voluntary basis. Unfortunately, due to a change of publisher, things did not go smoothly but plans have been set in place to ensure this doesn't happen again.

You will all have received information asking how you wish to receive your Proceedings, electronically or paper copy and hopefully have responded.

We have been successful in recruiting an editor for the newsletter. Martin Salzer plans to retire this year and was looking for an activity he could enjoy doing.

We had also recruited a website manager who manages her own website but unfortunately, she has now had to step back as her working hours have increased considerably. Discussions are to take place with another volunteer who already contributes to the website, with a plan B in the background.

Shonie Millward-Usher agreed to do a power point presentation about the tunnels under Taunton for the volunteers day which is held each year. In 2018 Julian Orbach organised access to some of the buildings in Taunton which are not readily available to the general public, and last year, three of the Taunton Town guides from the Museum of Somerset took the volunteers on a history tour of the town. With the incidence of Covid-19 we are not sure if this event will go ahead this year.

Covid-19 has had a devastating effect on our ability to fund raise, there were to be three whole day events which would hopefully have produced in the region of £3,000, plus all that is raised by the individual committees each month.

The office manager continued working from home when the Heritage Centre closed its doors in March and returned at the beginning of August when it re-opened.

The Board will continue to meet virtually until it is known to be safe to do otherwise.

Due to the restrictions put in place by the government to control the epidemic, many of the contributors to our proceedings have had difficulty in finalising their work. The decision was taken to delay the closing date for contributions to enable them to do so. We are hoping that we will be able to go to print in November/December.

Finances

We have recently received the 2019 draft accounts for the financial year that ended on the 31st December 2019. I emphasise the word "draft" as there are still a few detailed issues to be settled: the main one of these is how the Publications Fund is dealt with. However, as I say, these are essentially detailed issues that should not have any significant effect on the results and may well be dealt with in the next set of accounts.

I'll deal with the accounts in a sequence that you might find surprising, but I think that it will make the issues clearer.

Endowed Funds

These are the funds where we spend the income, but not the capital: H St Gray, Tite, William, Maltwood & Natural Sciences.

While our investment income was a little lower than the previous year (£13.8k vs £14.4), it was also marginally above our budget. Against the background of the Brexit debate it's perhaps surprising that things went that well.

However, the outcome for the current year is much more uncertain. We have already seen Covid-19 leading to substantial drops in stock market valuations. While in the longer term these may be recovered, it seems unlikely that will happen during the current year. It also seems unlikely that a viable vaccine will be generally available until well into 2021 and the reduction in current GDP is

likely to be very significant. As a result, I believe that we should expect a reduction, perhaps very significant in the capital value of these funds during this year.

Restricted Funds

In the past, this group has contained the “spending money” of the endowed funds, as well as the Murless Fund. Last year, the Dunster Project was moved into this group, as it has a restricted purpose. This year, the Norman Gardens monies have also been moved into this group for the same reasons. Details for these can be found in Note 3 of the accounts.

The discussion outlined under Endowed Funds plays in a similar way as far as the Restricted Funds are concerned. However, here the effect will more concern income streams, which are also likely to be affected by the combination of market and GDP, as well as with minimal interest rates.

Incidentally, it might help you if I gave a short explanation of how project accounting works through the books, as in the case of Dunster. In 2018 our income from HLF was £6,582 and we spent £2,128, leaving a balance of £4,454: Both of the first two of these showed in the 2018 accounts. The balance is shown in Note 15 of the 2019 accounts in the first block. Against it is set last year's spend of £1,205, leaving a balance of £3,249. Also last year we received a further payment of £2,870 from the HLF and that is shown in the second block, Restricted Funds.

Unrestricted Funds

Everything else that we do is reflected under this heading, which includes all the activities linked to the remainder of the funds: Dunster, as described above, Museum Exhibits and Publications, as well as the General Purposes and Contingency Funds.

Page 1 of the accounts shows how funds flowed in and out of SANHS, where the concentration is not on profit and loss in the old way, but on how the Total Funds of the enterprise have changed over the year. At this level, SANHS did very well last year, with Total Funds growing from £323k to £412k.

However, while much concentration has been spent over recent years in trying to give the public a better picture of the real value of organisations, the problem is that some things still don't show in the figures. The reason for the apparent strengthening of Total Funds is the income received from both Norman Gardens and Proceedings, neither of which are accompanied by their costs, both of which are still to come.

By the end of 2019 we had received some £67k from the two donor streams involved with these projects. If we remove that amount from the 2019 Total Funds figure of £412k, we are left with a figure of £345k, which removes most of the apparent year on year improvement.

A similar issue arises with the value of the General Fund. At the end of 2018 it amounted to £7.4k and at the end of 2019 to £19.2k, which seems to be a major improvement. But, within that latter figure is the grant for Proceedings amounting to £8.5k. What is more, 2019 did not bear the costs of a year's edition: 2020 is due to bear the cost of two editions and the costs of converting to an electronic method. I fear that apparent improvement will be more than eaten up by these costs.

Conclusion

I believe that these accounts give a true and fair appreciation of the Financial Year 2019. As such, I have no doubts that the Trustees should accept them as they stand: the few minor issues can be dealt with later.

We should not read into them any great success on our part, except in the area of fund-raising. However, that fund-raising still needs to lead on to success and there is still a long way to go before we can be sure of that.

Postscript

Since the report above was first written little has changed as far as 2019 was concerned. The minor problems referred to in the opening paragraphs have been resolved, subject to a small change that will be put through in 2020. However, the Covid-19 related matters referred to elsewhere are having significant effects in the current year. As far as day-to-day trading is concerned, the talks and visits that are so important to our members have had to be cancelled with the subsequent loss of earnings.

We still have to see what effect these problems have on our fund investments. In the early days of the pandemic, I was concerned that we might lose significant parts of the income we use for providing grants, as well as having capital losses on the funds themselves. Whilst the market did drop considerably, much of the capital loss has been recovered, although the remainder of the year might yet see repeated drops. However, it has become very apparent that there will be a widespread fall in dividend payments which will have a concomitant effect of our ability to provide grants.

The Board of Trustees have worked hard to protect our finances during the past few months. However, there is little doubt that 2020 will prove to be a more difficult year than 2019.

SANHS Executive Committee March 2020